

20 YEARS LATER

Sally Ride continues to inspire the next generation of explorers



Informal portrait of Astronaut Sally Ride, believed to have been taken in September of 1985, after she had completed two spaceflights.

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by Lisa Tidwell

JUNE 18, 1983, was a day that forever changed the face of the American space program. On this day, Dr. Sally Kirsten Ride made history by becoming the first American woman in space. This event, which had been anticipated since the first Astronaut class that included women was chosen in 1977, gave inspiration to girls around the nation.

Twenty years after her historic flight, Ride is still inspiring young girls to explore their interest in math and science with the creation of Imaginary Lines, a non-profit organization, and the Sally Ride Science Club.

"One of our goals is to make girls feel like they belong to the scientific community and help them connect to this community and stay involved," Ride said.

Imaginary Lines was founded to support girls who are interested in science, math and technology. Its mission is to increase the number of girls who are technically literate and who have the foundation they need to go on in these fields of study. The foundation holds science festivals around the nation for upper elementary and middle school girls to share a day of workshops and hands-on activities, all related to scientific and technological fields.

The Sally Ride Science Club, another part of Imaginary Lines, is the first national club with the mission of supporting girls in their exploration of the universe of science and technology. The Club enables girls to consult with experts, exchange ideas, collaborate with peers and embark on all sorts of adventures.

"Our future lies with today's kids and tomorrow's space exploration," Ride said. "With that combination, not even the sky's the limit."

Growing up in Southern California, Ride never subscribed to the thought that a woman can only do certain things. It was this train of thought that led her to become a nationally ranked tennis player in her late teens, earn bachelor's degrees in physics and English and a Ph.D. in physics, all from Stanford University, and eventually become one of the first six women in the Astronaut Corps at age 28.

Ride's historic first spaceflight was aboard the Space Shuttle *Challenger* during STS-7. During the six-day mission, the five-member crew deployed communication satellites for Canada and Indonesia, performed the first satellite deployment and retrieval with the shuttle's robotic arm and conducted scientific research.

In 1984, Ride flew again aboard *Challenger* on STS 41-G. Training for her third flight, STS 61-M, was interrupted in January 1986 by the *Challenger* accident. Ride served as a member of the Presidential Commission investigating the accident and later moved to NASA Headquarters as Special Assistant to the Administrator for long-range and strategic planning. She left NASA in 1987 to return to academia.

In 1989, after two years as a Science Fellow at Stanford University, Ride was named the Director of the California Space Institute and a Professor at the University of California at San Diego where she remains today.



Sally Ride is interviewed by ABC News Reporter Lynn Sherr during a break in STS-7 training at JSC (May 4, 1983).

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While serving as the Executive Vice President and member of the Board of Directors for space.com from 1999 - 2000, Ride became involved in EarthKAM, or Earth Knowledge Acquired by Middle school students. EarthKAM is a NASA education program that enables students, teachers and the public to learn about Earth by using the Internet to take pictures of the Earth with a camera mounted on the International Space Station.

The EarthKAM program targets middle school students, which can be a crucial age in the development of students' interests and future careers. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), middle school is the age when many girls begin losing interest in math and science. Ride is working to change that.

According to NCES statistics, an equal number of fourth-grade girls and boys are interested in math and science, but by eighth grade, half as many girls as boys are still interested in these areas. Imaginary Lines is designed to "sustain [girls'] natural interests during the critical years, when so many of them drift away," according to the program's Web site.

Ride will be celebrating the 20th Anniversary of her flight along with Educator Astronaut Barbara Morgan at the Sally Ride Super Festival, which is expected to attract more than 1,000 young girls and their families. The event will take place June 21 and 22 at Kennedy Space Center; and as part of the festival, participants can watch Ride be inducted into the Astronaut Hall of Fame.

"As time goes by I realize more and more what an honor it was to be chosen to be the first woman to fly on the Space Shuttle, and how important my flight was to young girls," Ride said.

Twenty years ago this month, Ride gave girls around the nation inspiration as *Challenger* carried her into the history books. Today, she continues this mission by reaching out to inspire the next generation of female explorers.



Closeup view of Sally Ride as she communicates with ground controllers onboard the Space Shuttle *Challenger* during STS-7.

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TOP
Sally Ride, Mission Specialist, communicates with ground controllers while floating in the aft flight deck of the Space Shuttle *Challenger* during the STS-7 mission (June 18-24, 1983).

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ABOVE
Sally Ride stands behind one of the T-38 aircraft at Ellington Field, near the Johnson Space Center, where the fleet of NASA jet trainers is housed.

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Sally Ride meets with some young admirers at the Los Angeles Science Festival, held March 29 at the California Institute of Technology.

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